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INDIANA COLLECTION
Hobart - History

Pennsy Depot Edition

"The Oldest News In Town"

Save Our Station — Give Now —

Hobart History Advocate

Hobart Historical Society | No. 3, 1983 | 706 E. 4th St., Hobart, IN 46342

THE RAILROAD ERA

"With the opening of the last half of the Nineteenth Century, there came from the eastward railroad builders, pushing their roads onward to the young city of Chicago; and before these roads could reach that city they must cross the counties of LaPorte, Porter and Lake. When the children and the deer and the water fowl heard the whistle of the engines that drew the freight trains, pioneer life came to an end." . . . *Timothy H. Ball*

The development of any territory, great or small, is largely dependent on its transportation facilities. Since its organization as a state in 1816, Indiana had struggled to build a transportation system of roads, canals and railroads. By 1840 the state was all but bankrupt and dreams of a state plan of internal improvements were curtailed.

Private initiative came into play and land owners, farmers and businessmen along proposed railroad routes cooperated to finance their building. Right-of-way was often donated. Stock in the railroad company was purchased and sometimes paid for by working on the road.

The state legislature, interested in promoting Indianapolis as a great midwestern rail center, did not favor any system going directly west by a northern route. The large railroad companies, wishing to skirt Lake Michigan on the route to Chicago, found it necessary to deal with small companies who already had franchises.

The Michigan Central Railroad, the first to cross the northern edge of Indiana, did not prove as great a benefit to farmers as did the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago, which traveled through more of the farming country of northern Indiana.

The Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago, according to the report of the Indiana State Board of Equalization on Railroads, was the first to run through Hobart in 1858. The railroad, financed largely by the Pennsylvania Railroad, had reached Valparaiso in the early 1850s. Lack of funds was stalling its progress. George Earle, with an eye on the future of his new town of Hobart, came to the rescue, buying stock in the railroad company and donating land for the right-of-way and the Hobart station.

EARLY STATION AGENTS

In the golden age of railroading, the station agent was as important a figure in the community as the doctor or minister. He was the railroad company's official representative, meeting the public as he sold tickets, dispensed travel advice, and directed freight and express movements.

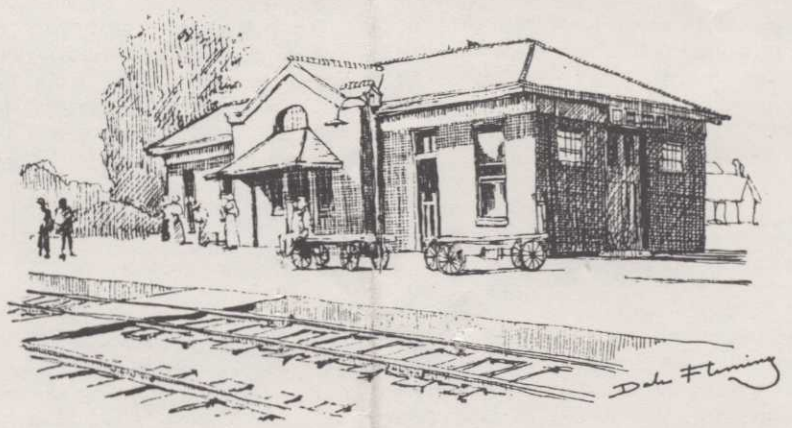
The telegrapher was another important employee. The telegraph was not only the means of transmitting railroad business but also, before other fast means of communication came along, carried other news as well. Election returns, National news, even the weather came to Hobart via the click of the key.

The earliest station in Hobart had only part-time or a few employees but as freight and passenger business increased, a resident agent was installed. Over the years the staff increased to include telegraphers, freight agents, assistants, and clerks on day and night shifts. Other local railroad employees included the section foreman and section gang who were responsible for track maintenance and the car inspector and his helpers.

Available records of the U.S. Census of Population show that in 1860 Robert Sanders was station agent. The 1870 Census listed George Wadge, assistant freight agent; Richard Wadge and Daniel T. Brown, telegraphers; Patrick Quinn, section foreman, and John H. Cook, brakeman. By 1880 Richard Wadge had progressed to station agent and John Cook to telegrapher. Garret Murphy was freight agent; Charles Kankin was telegrapher and Wellington Brownbridge was listed as an employee. The 1880 Census also shows that William Rifenburg, prominent Hobart businessman, was now engaged in railroad timber contracting, having lost his planing mill and sash, door and blind factory in a fire in 1878.

J.T. Stroupe became station agent in 1881. W.M. Foster became station agent in 1895. At the time the present depot was constructed, in 1911, E.C. Sayger was station agent.

HOBART'S PENNSY DEPOT



THE PENNSYLVANIA LINES

(Reprinted from THE HOBART GAZETTE, souvenir supplement, May 1898.)

The Pennsylvania system stands at the very head of America's railways, both in efficiency of service and popularity with the people who live along its lines. The policy of the company has always been to build up local freight and passenger traffic, thereby developing the territory through which run its vast network of main lines and branches which connect Chicago, St. Louis and other western trade and industrial centers with the great marts of the east, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Baltimore and the nation's Capitol.

The natural location of Hobart with reference to Chicago, and the efforts made by the Company's officials to favor our town in every consistent manner, have resulted in a splendid and satisfactory passenger and freight service, and it is safe to say that the Pennsylvania Lines consequently enjoy an unusual local popularity and patronage.

Our passenger service to the city consists of three daily trains -- one early in the morning, one near mid-day, and one late in the afternoon. The service from the city includes four trains, giving the best possible opportunities to use the entire business day to the best possible advantage.

The freight service is as nearly perfect as the present state of transportation development will warrant. Goods purchased in Chicago reach Hobart the same day, greatly to the advantage of our merchants and residents. Hobart is the intersection and transfer point of the P.Ft.W. & Chicago and the E.J. & E. Belt Line; a fact which contributes very greatly alike to the advantage of our people and the company. The Pennsylvania Lines are the pioneers in low freight and passenger rates to and from Hobart, which fact, considered with their superb and unequaled service, accounts for the great popularity enjoyed by this peerless railway system.

The importance of Hobart as a station on this line may be inferred from the fact that a day and a night operator, two clerks, and a car-repairer are required to reinforce the efforts of the agent at Hobart.

DEPOT HISTORY

The Pennsy Depot is the third Pennsy station building to serve Hobart. Two earlier station buildings were of frame construction.

Railroad companies provided depots for the comfort of passengers and the protection of freight. Early stations tended to be wooden sheds. Beginning in the late 19th century, many states established railroad regulatory commissions whose functions included setting requirements for better station facilities. An attractive depot was important to the community image so architectural style was a matter of great interest. The railroad companies had to balance these factors with the demands of business.

Beginning in the 1880s, the Pennsylvania Railroad adopted standard plans for its depots west of Pittsburgh. The size and features of the depot plans varied, depending on the volume of business. It is probable that Hobart's depot was built from one of the standard plans in use in 1911.

The architects were Price and McDanahan of Philadelphia. The cost was $25,000. Work began in July 1911 and the new Pennsy depot was opened in January 1912. The depot served Hobart for over 60 years until it was closed in the early 1970s.

Hobart's depot is a combination station, accommodating passengers, freight and office under one roof. It does not have a bay for train control as many stations do. The Pennsylvania Railroad frequently used separate control towers when a high volume of business and/or dense traffic movements existed. This is the case in Hobart where the control tower is located along the track south of the depot.

The depot is a one-story building, 25' x 65'. The central waiting room is 20' x 25' with a freight room of the same size on one end and an office and ladies' waiting room on the other. There is a basement under the freight room.

The exterior is of pressed brick with ceramic tile inserts set in the brick cap border below the roof and in the pediments on the main entries. The roof, now shingled, was originally slate with tile caps and copper gutters.

The most noticeable alteration is that the freight room floor and dock have been raised with changes in windows and doors to the new level. However, the original high arched ceiling in the waiting room and many other interior features are still in place.

Your Contribution Can Help
☞ SAVE OUR STATION! ☜

To: S.O.S. Fund
To: P.O. Box 24
To: Hobart, Indiana 46342

Here is my contribution of $_____ to help restore and preserve Hobart's Pennsy Depot. (Make check payable to the S.O.S. Fund.)

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Contributions are tax-deductible

WHY SAVE OUR STATION?

Hobart's Pennsy Depot, located beside the Pennsy (now CONRAIL) tracks at Lillian and Illinois streets, is a local landmark. For many local people it holds fond memories.

It is important as a symbol of the first railroad through Hobart, a turning point in history, which brought the area out of the pioneer age and put the settlers in close contact with the outside world. Thus, the Pennsy Depot is also a link to the history of our nation which experienced similar great change as the rails pushed their way across the continent.

By saving and restoring the Pennsy Depot, we can show that we need not destroy the past to build the future. Instead, we can link past and future by preserving the best of one and adapting it to the needs of the other.

Finally, the most important reason to save the Pennsy Station is because the community is interested and supports its preservation. The donated services, muscle and time; the financial support, and the messages of encouragement -- in short, the responses to the Pennsy Depot S.O.S. show that Hobart believes the Pennsy Depot should be saved.

BUYING THE DEPOT FOR HOBART

On February 23, 1983, ownership of the Pennsy Depot was transferred to the Save Our Station Committee of the Hobart Historical Society in an ancient ceremony based on English common law.

S.O.S. Chairman Ed Prentiss, Society President Elin Christianson and Attorney Anthony Cefali met with CONRAIL's representative on the Depot property. Cefali picked up a twig, broke it in half and handed one piece to the seller, thus binding the sale according to ancient English tradition.

Earlier, in more ordinary surroundings, the modern exchange of deed and check had taken place.

Efforts to purchase the Pennsy Depot began early in 1982 when the late Congressman Adam Benjamin, Jr. learned that it might be available. Mayor Calvin Green and Robert Krull pursued Benjamin's lead and invited interested citizens to meet with CONRAIL personnel in late April. At that time CONRAIL offered the property at $6,000 to a non-profit organization with a public service intent.

Realizing that they must act quickly, the citizens went to work and, within a month, had formed the Save Our Station Committee under the sponsorship of the Hobart Historical Society which had the necessary legal status.

First efforts were concentrated on fund-raising and initial restoration work. In the fall of 1982 emergency repairs were made to prevent further deterioration with permanent restoration work beginning in early 1983 and proceeding as funds allow.

The excellent progress of the Save Our Station project would not have been possible without the interest Hobart has shown or the contributions of funds and services that have been made. Among the many valued contributors, the Hobart Industrial and Commercial Foundation and the Office of the Hobart Township Trustee provided major financial support.

In addition, the citizens who have given their valuable time to the S.O.S. Committee deserve recognition. They include: Dorothy Ballantyne, Anthony Cefali, Elin Christianson, Virginia Curtis, Jim Finan, Chuck Flick, Cal Green, Mary Glynn, Richard Harrigan, David Katz, Bob Krull, Jerry Pavese, Ed Prentiss, Vic Sable, Dick Shaw and Brook Sonnicksen.

GOOD TIMES

The out-of-town ball players would come to Hobart on the 9:00 a.m. Pennsylvania (mail)train and depart on the 7:30 evening train. They made their headquarters at the Hobart House Hotel while in Hobart. A horse-drawn bus was operated by the Hotel between their location on Main Street and the Pennsylvania Depot for a ten cent fee.

Many Hobart residents would walk to the Pennsylvania Depot on Sunday evenings to see the ball players leave. Young boys would gather pond lilies, which grew in abundance on Lake George, and sell bouquets to the ball players and other passengers on the train for a few cents. . . . *Clare Fleck.*

HOBART'S GATEWAY

In the 19th century, the railroad depot was Hobart's gateway to the world. It was, of course, the focal point for farmers, businessmen and local manufacturers sending and receiving goods. The depot was the departing place for business and pleasure trips for Hobart residents and it was the arrival point for visitors and settlers. At train time the depot was the scene of bustling activity, with wagons arriving to unload or load goods and people waiting to take the train out, welcome arriving passengers, or just to pass the time of day by watching the hustle and bustle.

The following personal accounts drawn from the Hobart Historical Society's resource files and from letters sent to the Save Our Station Committee, provide vivid pictures of bygone days and underline the many different ways in which the Pennsy Depot was important in Hobart life.

NEWCOMERS

In the fall of 1866 John Manasseh Gordon made his first trip to Hobart from Richmond, Tioga County, Pennsylvania, to visit his brother, Dr. Pliny Power Gordon. Mr. Gordon arrived on a rainy October evening, coming from Chicago on the Pennsylvania train. Arriving at the station, he asked the way to the hotel. At that time, Third Street was not open as there was no bridge over Duck Creek. He followed a road paralleling the Pennsylvania Railroad until he came to Front Street, walked down Front Street to the corner of Main and Front streets to the hotel, built and operated by a Mrs. Young and called Young's Hotel. . . . *Mary Gordon Ballantyne.*

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My first memory of Hobart was that of a small girl who had been placed in the care of a conductor on the Pennsylvania Railroad to be given to her father at Hobart. Having passed through so many towns, I was very sure the conductor had forgotten me or he did not know where Hobart was. But after some time we arrived and I was so relieved to find the conductor did know something of Hobart and had not forgotten, that my greeting to my father was a strange one. While I stood by his side I saw two hands outstretched toward each other. They met in a hand clasp and a look passed between them, meaningless to me, but in after years I knew the conductor and my father must have been fraternal brothers and the look between them, an understanding one. In a few minutes we were at home and I was happy. . . . *Myrtle Briggs Strattan.*

AN UNWELCOME VISIT

The black small pox was brought to Hobart the spring of 1878 from Chicago where there was a very bad epidemic of this dread disease.

The midnight train from Chicago stopped at the old Pennsylvania Station. Two young women were the only passengers for Hobart. The young women went into the station and told the night telegraph operator they were going to sit there until their father came in with the milk for the morning milk train.

Many daughters of German immigrants went to Chicago and did house work. These two young women were among them.

When their father delivered the milk in the morning the station clerk told them his daughters were in the station, quite sick. The farmer drove his girls to Dr. P.P. Gordon's home and Dr. Gordon pronounced them ill with small pox.

The station night clerk noted the two young women had drunk two pails of water during the night.

Needless to state, the two young women died and many other Hobart families were afflicted.

I remember one incident of that time. My small bed was in the bedroom of my parents. During the night I was awakened by hearing them talking and the clop, clop of horses' hooves on the frozen ground. My father said "It is the -- family, three of their children died today and are being buried tonight."

The Hobart History Advocate
No. 3, 1983
Hobart Historical Society, Inc.
706 E. 4th Street
P.O. Box 24
Hobart, Indiana 46342

Save Our Station Committee:
Ed Prentiss, Chairman

Advocate Staff: Dorothy Ballantyne, Elin Christianson, Woody Woodruff, Ruby Woodruff, Jane Woodruff

My uncle, Dr. Gordon, came to the house to vaccinate our family and I remember my younger brother, now Dr. E.R. Gordon, was a baby in long clothes and cried when his arm was scratched. . . . *Mary Gordon Ballantyne.*

THE STATION AGENT

Richard Wadge was the first agent of the Pennsylvania Railroad and had one of the best libraries in the State. He served in the Indiana Senate. Mr. Wadge sometimes indulged in the "flowing bowl" and had a practice of taking some of his books to Chicago, pawning the books, and then indulging some more. One time he took a valuable set of J. Fenimore Cooper. My father would follow him up, redeem the books and take them back to Mr. Wadge. However, Mr. Wadge would say, "No, William, those books are yours now. I have that set of Cooper." . . . *Grace Rifenburg Conroy.*

This turn of the century profile of Hobart's Pennsy station agent illustrates his standing. "W.M. Foster: The Pennsylvania Company is represented in Hobart by Mr. W.M. Foster, who has for three years past filled the position of station agent in a manner highly satisfactory to our people and without doubt pleasing to his company. Mr. Foster's entire career as a railroad man has been passed with the Pennsylvania Company, starting ten years ago as a student of telegraphy. He is prominent and active in social, musical and literary circles and enjoys a large personal popularity. In June of 1896 he was united in matrimony to Miss Julia C. Butler, a charming and accomplished young lady of Hobart."

GOOD BUSINESS

Hobart was a busy, hustling town. The Pennsylvania Railroad had a daily schedule of seven trains in and seven trains out of Chicago daily. The Pennsylvania Railroad employed a station agent, telegrapher, clerk and members of a section gang. The milk train started at Plymouth, Indiana, continued to Hobart, Froebel's Crossing, and stopping to load milk at Liverpool and continued on to Chicago. Milk pick-ups discontinued in 1932.

All the railroads' facilities had cattle loading ramps which averaged 75 feet by 75 feet. . . . *Harold Tabbert.*

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William B. Owen's yards have a capacity of 70 tons/day of finished product including terra cotta roofing, flooring and arch porous building tile. The yards adjoin the Pittsburgh, Ft. Wayne & Chicago (Pennsylvania Railroad) railway and have abundant trackage facilities. The product of Mr. Owen's plant is shipped from Maine to California. . . . *THE HOBART GAZETTE, May 1898.*

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"When I was a boy, we shipped milk from our farm to Chicago. Each day we took around 12 cans of milk to the freight room at the Pennsy Depot. Each can held 8 gallons. You bought shipping tags and attached them to the cans. The tags cost 14 cents. We got 67 cents for a can of milk. If collections were slow in Chicago, the dairies were even slower paying us. I used to wonder, when I was getting up at 3:45 a.m. to get the milk ready, load up and haul it to the depot, why I was doing it if we were't going to get paid! . . . *Edward H. Hahn.*

THE MILK TRAIN

The center of activity for many years of the village of Hobart was the Pennsylvania station -- from 7:00 a.m. to 8:15 a.m.

The cause of this activity was the milk train that arrived at 8:15 a.m. This train was "made up" at Wanatah and was a combination local passenger train, baggage and express.

This train's cause for being was to get fresh milk to the citizens of Chicago, Illinois. Farmers driving wagon loads of heavy, large tin cans filled with cooled milk began arriving from all directions anywhere from 6:30 to 8:00 in the morning. The milk unloaded on the platform supplied for the convenience of the farmers also held the returned cans of previous deliveries.

This milk shipping activity was one of the most active factors in the support of the merchants of Hobart. The farmer's monthly milk check supplied him with ready money the year around.

The Hobart stores were all open at 7:00 a.m. so that the farmers could do their shopping on their return trip.

It seems hardly credible that Hobart supported three drug stores, eleven grocery stores, six dry good stores, three millinery stores, two tailor shops, two harness shops, two wagon shops, seven churches, eleven saloons, two drays, one photographer, two furniture stores, two jewelry stores, two hardware stores, two bakery stores and one bakery shop, three blacksmiths, one cobbler, a weekly paper, two barber shops, one stone cutter, three doctors, one lawyer, a large hotel, and several boarding houses. These were all supported by a population of not over 1,200 people -- and a farming community surrounding the village.

The milk train was one of the victims of progress; now, the milk is carried to its destination in beautiful white trucks and carried over fine concrete roads instead of through mud, clay, sand, dust and snow drifts by plodding, patient farm horses. . . . *Mary Gordon Ballantyne.*

. . . COMMUTERS

The milk train to Chicago could be boarded at North Lake Park Avenue, Wheeler, and other crossroad stations where farmers left their milk cans to be picked up. Adventurous riders often "hopped" a slow freight train, dropping off when they reached their destination. One pioneer Hobart man is reported to have courted his girl in this manner, hopping a freight near his home, riding to hers, and returning. If the train was traveling fast, he would turn the car brake to slow the train so he could alight. We've also heard some folks confess that when they were children they would hop slow freights out to Garden City to pick flowers.

. . . AND MAIL

The mail came in and out of Hobart via train, too. Trains carried mail cars and mail was sorted on the trains. Sacks of mail were often dropped off or put aboard without stopping the train. A pole near the tracks held the mail sack suspended in the air and the mail clerks aboard the train would lean out and hook the bag and draw it into the car, tossing out any mail sacks they had to the waiting messenger for Hobart. Luther Roper, a mail clerk on the trains, and Clinton Peck, a messenger for the post office, were two local men in this service.

EXCURSION TRAINS

For several years Mr. William Rifenburg, Superintendent of the Unitarian Sunday School, arranged a picnic at Sheffield Park, adjacent to the Roby Race Track, now occupied by the Lever Brothers Soap Company. All the townspeople were invited and the Pennsylvania Railroad ran a special train from Valpo to Whiting, at reduced rates.

Sheffield Park had the usual rides and games found at County Fairs and a bath-house where we could change our clothes and go swimming.

The women had labored for days preparing their most tempting dishes and everyone ate all they could hold, and a grand time was had by all. In the afternoon a snack was served before returning, consisting of ice cream and cake, melons and fruit. On the way home everyone was happy and singing, and planning for the next year. Later the race track was removed to make way for industrial buildings and Sheffield was no longer desirable, so the excursions were switched to Culver and Lake Maxinkuchee, via the Nickel Plate Railroad which proved equally satisfactory -- at least 300 attended. . . . *Dr. Harry C. Parker.*

JOYOUS OCCASION

Though I remember taking occasional trips to Chicago and one to Niagara Falls, leaving from the Pennsy Station and remember a few times when visitors to our home arrived there by train, my unforgettable memory of that place was the day when the Hobart High School Band returned (I believe from Denver, Colorado) victorious in their first of many national contests. I am sure the entire town had gathered there to greet them. The train was very late, but no one left. When it finally arrived and the excited passengers and joyous hometown relatives and friends seemed to join in a mass embrace, the overwhelming feeling of elation and pride I had was one never before experienced and only a few times since has a single event captivated my whole being as much. . . . *Emily Jones Walcher.*

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Mary Gordon Ballantyne (1874 - 1959) was born and lived for many years in Hobart. In 1947 she wrote a number of memories for the Hobart Centennial Committee. Several of her memories involve the role of the railroads and are included here. Her uncle, Dr. Pliny P. Gordon, was Hobart's first doctor. John Manasseh Gordon, her father, eventually settled in Hobart and operated Gordon Brothers Pharmacy. The only surviving home of the Gordon family is Dr. Edwin R. Gordon's house at Second and Center, now St. Bridget's convent.

Myrtle Briggs Strattan was born in 1862 in Columbia City, Indiana. From there, her family moved to Larwell, Indiana, and in 1869, to Hobart, where the Briggs family lived on Main Street. After about 10 years' teaching in Crown Point, Valparaiso, Deep River, Ross Township, Clayhill School (across from Crown Hill Cemetery) and the original Hobart High School building, Myrtle married Ben Strattan.

Mrs. Strattan lived in a gray frame house at 422 Center Street, built by her father in 1882. She once recalled that when she moved to Center Street it was just like an alley, unpaved, with deep ruts and no sidewalks.

Her reminiscence is not dated, but is believed to have been written in the 1930s when information was being collected for the Federal Writers Program of the WPA or in 1947 for the Centennial.

Grace Rifenburg Conroy (18 - 1954) was the daughter of William H. and Sabrina Rifenburg. First settling in Hobart in 1857, William Rifenburg became one of Hobart's leading citizens and served in the State legislature. Mrs. Conroy's memory was written for the Hobart Centennial.

Harold C. Tabbert (1894 - 1975) was a life-long Hobart resident. His account is from a talk he prepared for the 100th anniversary of M.L. McLelland Lodge No. 357, F. & A. M. His grandfather, Louis Wettengel (1825 - 1905) settled in Hobart in 1860 and was a prominent citizen of the community.

Edward H. Hahn (1905 - 1980), a Hobart resident for most of his life, was active in the Hobart Historical Society, serving as president for 5 years.

Dr. Harry C. Parker (1877 - 1977) was born in Hobart and was connected through his marriage to Edith Wood to the Wood and Rifenburg families, pioneers in Deep River and Hobart. An eye, ear, nose and throat specialist, he practiced in Gary for 50 years.

Clare Fleck's contribution to this issue is taken from her story of the turn-of-the-century Hobart Maroons baseball team. That story was published in an earlier edition of *The Hobart History Advocate.*

Emily Jones Walcher, now of Bloomington, Indiana, lived in Hobart from 1924 to 1940. A 1934 graduate of Hobart High School, Mrs. Walcher and her brothers, Thomas and Charles, played in the Hobart High School band under Dr. William D. Revelli.

Change in Time of Trains on Pennsylvania Lines.

Under a new schedule in effect Nov. 27th, passenger trains over the Pennsylvania lines leave Hobart Station as follows:

FOR THE EAST.

No. 6	1:18 a.m.
No. 30	8:57 a.m.
No. 48	3:40 p.m.
No. 38	6:32 p.m.

FOR THE WEST.

No. 49	7:40 a.m.
No. 37	10:35 a.m.
No. 39	3:58 p.m.

*Sunday only.

For particular information on the subject apply to W. M. Foster, Ticket Agent.

Colonist Tickets to the West and Northwest via Pennsylvania Lines.

One-way, second-class colonist tickets to California, the North Pacific Coast, Montana and Idaho, will be sold via Pennsylvania Lines from March 1st to May 15th, inclusive. For particulars apply to nearest Ticket Agent of those lines.

THE HOBART GAZETTE, March 3, 1905